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ABSTRACT

Two secondary out-of-school activities were evaluated to determine how well each met rigorous definitions of curriculum. It was found that the activities--a whitewater canoe trip and a series of 3 10-day expeditions to a boreal forest, a subarctic area, and a mountain setting--both met the criteria for curriculum including intent of the teacher to teach and of the student to learn, sustained application, ordered content, and seriousness attributed to the enterprise by the participants. However, the canoe trip is treated as noncurriculum by the school while the expeditions are treated as a proper part of the curriculum and called by a regular school subject title, Environmental Biology. If it strains the concept of curriculum too much to include activities having the attributes ascribed to education, but outside the recognized subject boundaries, then another conceptualization is needed to reflect the valuable impact that these activities have on the participants. The current practice of defining all such school activities negatively as noncurriculum fails to do them justice. The notion of curriculum needs to include educating activities that transcend the subjects and the school boundaries but otherwise meet rigorous criteria of education. (JHZ)

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PROBING THE BOUNDARIES OF CURRICULUM: LESSONS FROM OUT-OF-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES.

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Introduction.

The status of school activities depends, in part, on whether they are regarded as belonging to the curriculum of the school. It is interesting that there is no word to designate school events, regardless of educational merit, except in terms of the curriculum. Dances, assemblies, athletic contests, plays and concerts are labelled in hyphenated fashion as non-, extra- or co-curricular activities. Justification and support for an activity may depend upon the perception that it is a legitimate component of curriculum. For this reason, it is important to be clear about what curriculum is.

There are extreme positions as to what constitutes curriculum. The Ontario Ministry of Education defines curriculum as "all experiences .... for which the school is responsible" (Ontario, 1984). Such a sweepingly inclusive definition would appear to solve the justification problem. But it is so grandiose as to be unwieldy both for practical implementation and for research. Furthermore, it includes situations which might clearly belong to the domain of recreation, or social life, to cite two examples which are distinctly different from education. Others (Wilson, 1977; Daniel and Coombs, 1982) provide more practical definitions based on argument and common usage. A restricted definition is clearer, easier to work with, but raises questions about the value and legitimacy of some activities which participants take seriously. Neither author claims perfection for their ideas. Indeed, Wilson invites tests of

his definition by the consideration of specific cases (p.67).

Therefore, in this paper I propose to probe the boundaries of curriculum by taking two potentially marginal cases as tests of the defining criteria set out in the papers previously cited. The most rigorous set of attributes in the literature have been chosen in order to provide the greatest challenge and trial of the value of the activities being considered. In the process, it will be necessary to consider how education is related to curriculum, because for many writers, the two are tightly linked and as curriculum goes, so goes education.

What Counts as Curriculum?

The most important criteria developed by synthesis from Wilson and from Daniels and Coombs are:

1. Intent must be present, both on the part of the teacher and of the learner.

The thrust of this criterion is to demand that teachers be deliberate about what they are trying to accomplish and that participants also be willing and knowing in terms of what is to be learned. Coincidental learning may happen along the way, but the point of curriculum is to "call the shots" in advance.

2. Sustained, regular or extended application.

It is agreed that curriculum must provide for an extended time interval of work. A brief, one-shot experience or lesson does not qualify. This criterion is largely a

matter of time spent, but it is closely related to the criterion of seriousness (number five in this list) because if we are serious about a particular enterprise then we are willing to devote considerable time to it at regular or extended intervals.

3. Directed toward producing learning.

The aim of curriculum is learning of the kind that results in education. Unfortunately, education is coming to have the same unmanageably broad range of meanings as does curriculum. Yet there are distinct efforts in the literature to restrict the meaning and this is the direction in which we will go. Nyberg and Egan (1981) argue for the need to distinguish important socializing functions from education. In doing so they refer to both the socializing "curriculum" and the educating "curriculum". The former distinction is helpful in trying to assess the status of out-of school activities, but the broad use of the term curriculum is not.

In their struggle to distinguish socialization from education, Nyberg and Egan find it easy to give positive accounts of socialization, but much more difficult to do for education. More often, education has to be characterized negatively as " not this" or "not that". Or perhaps as "beyond this or that". However in two places, very interesting ideas emerge which root education and the curriculum into the culture. A cultural basis for education makes a lot of sense in respect to Peters' idea of education as initiation, and provides for a rich diversity of

educational goals, just as there is a rich diversity of cultural variants.

"... the purpose of education is ultimately to develop a sense of the pleasures of appreciating and taking part in one's culture." (Nyberg and Egan, p.1)

" ... it [education] refers to a range of cultural attainments that do not serve any particular social ends while enriching in some way the life of the person who acquires them". (Nyberg and Egan, p.3)

Wilson (1977) takes a broad view of education. For him, serious and sustained learning that leads to coherent and comprehensive knowledge and understanding can count. For Peters (1963, 1967), education is determined by the process of being initiated into a moral or worthwhile form of thought, "from the inside"; and the term marks out a set of criteria very like those being listed here for curriculum.

Indeed, many of the claims made to characterize the learning that leads to education are the same as those used to characterize curriculum. This makes sense when one understands that curriculum is one of the key instruments for achieving education. The point of this criterion for curriculum, then, is to require that the kind of learning which ensues be the kind that leads to education as characterized above.

4. Ordered, or at least partially ordered content.

All of the authors cited give this criterion. The stuff of curriculum (and of education) must have structure such that in the learning of it some things precede others. There might be a hierarchy, or some other form of sequence. But

the organized quality of the content and the processes is clearly a necessary condition.

5. Taken seriously, as by being socially authorized in an institutional setting.

Curriculum must be taken seriously by the participants. As mentioned, the seriousness of a case could be revealed by the amount of time, or the pride of place devoted to it. Similarly, the establishment of socially approved institutions, such as schools, indicates the general level of seriousness attributed to educative activities. When a school staff or a Board of Education decide to devote time, energy and budget to a particular enterprise, it may be inferred that the enterprise is taken seriously.

6. Curriculum is distinct from the methods and motivational climate used for instruction.

It seems desirable not to confuse the content of learning as deliberately planned and sequenced in the curriculum with the methods of delivery chosen by the teacher and with the motivational climate created in the particular social setting. Valuable learning may be "picked up" from the enthusiasm, the drill techniques or the blackboard work of a teacher, to list examples, but the essential feature of curriculum is to be neutral with respect to these variables.

Probing the Boundaries of Curriculum.

Out-of-school activities provide useful tests of the criteria. Or, it might be preferable to claim that the criteria provide a useful test of the value in education of the activies. In any case, events that take teachers and pupils beyond reach of the school and its routine delivery of time and space for specifically educative work are suspect of going beyond the criteria of curriculum. There are trivial instances in which this is obviously the case. For example, a class trip to a shopping centre for free time as a reward at the end of term could not meet the criteria. Nor could a school-sponsored trip to a theatre in which the play was not part of the ongoing work of the school.

For our purposes two substantial activities provide the test cases. One case to be tried against the criteria is a whitewater canoe expedition. Information about the canoe trip planning, training and operation was gathered over a number of trips using techniques of participant observation and interviewing of both students, teachers and parents. Prima facie, this set of activities is not part of the curriculum. It is treated as non-curriculum by the school, the definition of it's directing Ministry notwithstanding. No credit is granted for the learning done. All funds are raised outside of the school budget by teacher and student work. There is sufficient staff support that some school time may be devoted to the activities but not to the extent of staff release time. Yet it will be shown that on all of the criteria, the activity may be construed as curriculum.

The second case is an activity which I want to label neutrally as "the triple expedition", also at the secondary level. Information was obtained from program literature, the teacher and assistant staff. This program is run entirely outside the school (except for critical organizational meetings at noon-hours) in three separate ten-day mobile expeditions to each of a boreal forest region, a sub-arctic area and a mountain setting. The outings occur in early September, mid-October and mid-May. Prima facie, largely on content grounds, this set of activities looks like a proper part of the curriculum domain. The school treats it as such, grants credit and validates the program as a course. It will be shown to have about the same degree of congruence with the criteria as does the canoe trip case.

Table 1 shows a summary of the two activities against the criteria of curriculum. Each entry requires some explanation and justification.

Table 1. Comparison of two out-of-school activities with the criteria for a curriculum.

CRITERION	TRIPLE EXPEDITION	WHITEWATER CANOE TRIP
INTENT	+	+
SUSTAINED	+	+
LEARNING	+	+
ORDERED	+	+
SERIOUS	+	+
NEUTRALITY	PARTLY	PARTLY

In both sets of activities there is a clear body of intent to educate and be educated. Teachers and students are fully informed as to what they are getting into and there is a marked degree of enthusiasm which is not compatible with allowing things to happen by accident. The deliberateness of the activities is emphasized by the degree of planning and preparation required by both teachers and students. Indeed, the work of preparation for the out-of-school activities constitutes an important part of the activity and reinforces the commitment and awareness of all the participants. On this criterion, then, both activities qualify as curriculum.

The triple expedition is pulsed in three sections over the school year. There is a period of regular noon-hour meetings to promote the work of preparation. A total of thirty days is spent on the expeditions proper. This seems to qualify as sustained, if irregular, activity. On a quantitatively reduced scale, the whitewater canoe trip is similar. Preliminary meetings are held to provide teaching in the proposed route, prerequisite skills, and travel group selection. Ten practice sessions are held on the water prior to a two-day shakedown trip which gives teaching and drill in white water. The planning and preparation interval extends over roughly four months prior to the expedition itself. In this latter case, the preparative phase includes fund-raising by the participants as no school support is available. Both activities could not be regarded as brief, temporary items lacking the seriousness compatible with devoting large amounts of time and effort to them. It also means that there is time available for all participants to think about what is transpiring.

In assessing whether these activities promote learning of the kind that would be called "education", it is important to recall that, in our present framework, the presence of education is to be judged as leading to knowledge and understanding that will inform other, novel situations, and will be related in some way to extending one's appreciation and participation in one's culture. Further, there should be some reasonable independence or autonomy in the way the knowledge and understanding is held. The reports of

participants indicate that these conditions are fulfilled. Wilderness travel and appreciation is clearly a part of the Canadian cultural heritage. Conversations with participants reveal that they experience a kind of initiation into that particular cultural milieu. They come to see it "from the inside", to use Peters' term, and to respond to its discipline. Their increasing independence and responsibility for themselves is a strong theme in student accounts of their experiences. And there is strong evidence that the expedition experience, more than any other school activity, takes the students into that most dangerous and critical aspect of education, knowledge of one's self. The learning during wilderness travel clearly initiates students into a new way of life, as described by White (1973).

It is tempting to paraphrase Nyberg and Egan in respect of the criterion of learning. They wrote (p. 3), in distinguishing educational from socializational goals, that "learning to read with refined critical discrimination and to write with style cannot be justified on criteria of direct social utility or relevance, but these skills may be justified on grounds of educational value." In the canoe trip case, the paraphrase is, "learning to read rapids with refined critical judgement and to shoot them with style and grace cannot be justified on grounds of direct social utility or relevance, but these skills may be justified on grounds of educational value."

Both sets of activities have a strongly sequential nature. There are rudimentary skills and knowledge which

must be possessed by students before they can proceed very far. There are inescapable and immediate consequences which follow failure in those rudiments. Further, as knowledge and insight increase, there are new and more advanced things to be mastered. This phenomenon is especially noticeable in the whitewater canoe expedition amongst students who participate for the second and third time. The activity, which on the surface appears to be the same, provides an entirely new, more profound set of learning, due in part to the readiness of the students to undertake more advanced tasks, and to participate with greater deliberation, awareness and thought.

The two activities are taken seriously by the participants. It is a question as to how seriously they are taken by the responsible authorities. That question is at the heart of the problem of justification. In the case of the whitewater expedition, more than a third of the teaching and administrative staff have been involved over the years. There is a strong body of parental and community support and the school does make it possible for a very small amount of student release time. All costs are paid by the participants or by fund-raising events; no public money supports the canoe trip. The activity is embedded in the school, but not in the curriculum, and to that extent the seriousness of the activity is in question.

The triple expedition has the same degree of general support, although only one staff member is fully involved. But in this case, the Board of Education has recognized the activity as curriculum and provides the same budget as for

any other course. Similarly, the activity carries academic credit for the students who are successful and teaching load credit for the teacher. In these respects, it is not surprising that the triple expedition is given a title that ties it to a school subject and is identified thereby, not as I have portrayed it here as an out-of-school activity, but as a regular subject, Environmental Biology. In this case, a rose by any other name is taken more seriously.

Finally, it is not clear that either activity is as neutral with respect to methods as the sixth criterion demands. The activities are not content with "know about" but also demand "know how, why, and when". This means that methods are constrained to those that provide direct experience with the content of wilderness travel and exploration of different environments. Lectures, guest speakers, demonstrations and movies, for example, while useful in the preparative phase, would not be methodologically sufficient to meet the intentions of the participants. Similarly, the requirements of safety constrain the choice of methods to be used. On the other hand, the activities provide a large degree of latitude for variations in methods within those givens. The main line of the activities, while requiring direct and safe experience, is neutral with respect to the particular pattern of teaching and motivation to be used.

Conclusion

I have tried to show how two particular out-of school activities compare with the criteria of a curriculum derived from the literature. The overall finding is that, despite the differing status of the two, they both appear to meet the criteria. Now, one problem is to understand why two activities of equivalent value should have different status. A second problem is to try to understand what the legitimate boundaries of curriculum are and to adjust accordingly.

As a hypothesis, I would like to suggest that a clue to the first problem may be found in the fact that the triple expedition has a title that puts the activity into the realm of a school subject. It may be possible that there is a tacit criterion for curriculum at work, one which the literature has not explicitly stated, to the effect that curriculum is the domain of the academic disciplines, the school subjects. This hypothesis is hinted at, but not developed by White (1982, pp. 10, 20). As there is a recognized subject called Biology which requires no further justification, then out-of-school activities which can bear such a label become legitimized. On the other hand there is no recognized school subject called whitewater canoeing, or wilderness travel, or independence and self-knowledge; and if my suggestion that there is a tacit criterion at work is true, then activities without an academic discipline focus, however valuable and however true to the overt criteria, cannot be legitimized as curriculum.

One of the major points of this probe is to attempt to

expose covert criteria like this one and to work toward greater precision and clarity in determining what the proper boundaries of curriculum are. The reason that it matters, aside from the needs of professional curriculum workers, is that the application of the curriculum label implies strong judgement about the value of the content for educating people. Mis-labelling leads to mis-educating. A part of this problem seems to be the fairly recent dominance and centrality of the concept of curriculum. The dominance has allowed the incorrect notion that the only learning that matters, and hence the only education of merit, comes through curriculum, understood under the hypothesis to be the school subjects. Contributing to the problem is the fact that there is no term in education to designate the valuable arenas of learning that do not fall within the subjects. It is hard to believe that something which is non-curriculum (logically, the totality of the entities excluded from the definition) can be educationally significant. This may help to explain the desire on the part of practitioners to expand to expand the definition of curriculum to include all activites having school sponsorship.

Activities having the attributes ascribed to education, but outside the recognized subject boundaries, either belong in the curriculum domain, or they do not. If it strains the concept of curriculum too much to include them, then another conceptualization is needed to reflect the valuable impact that these sorts of things have on the participants. "Socialization", at least in the terms used by Nyberg and

Egan is not satisfactory because the learning involved does not specifically fit the learner to take a place in society. And the current practice of lumping all such school activities together into an amorphous set defined negatively as non-curriculum fails to do them justice. The notion of curriculum needs to look beyond the subjects and the disciplines far enough to include those activities which can be shown to be educative. Or failing that, we need a new positive term to include the content of educating activities transcending the subjects and the school boundaries which otherwise meet rigorous criteria of education.

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